

Judith Clurman on Preserving and Supporting the Choral Tradition

Interview with Judith Clurman Part Four



By [Katrina Schmidt](#)
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The following is part of a four-part interview with [Judith Clurman](#), an Emmy-nominated and Grammy-nominated conductor and choral master. She is both an advocate for new music and great works of the past. In the words of contemporary composer Jennifer Higdon, “Working with Judith Clurman is always a delight. She’s so professional and such a superb musician, that I always know the end result will be incredible...a great thing for a composer to know.” She has collaborated and worked with numerous renowned organizations from Lincoln Center’s Great Performers series and the New York Pops to Sesame Street. Her past accomplishments are extensive and will be discussed in length, but what is even more important is her relevance in today’s choral world.

In this part of the written interview, Clurman shares her insights on how to use social media to support choral music, blend in a choir, and more. Be sure to check out parts [one](#), [two](#), and [three](#) of the interview.

When working with you in rehearsal, you mentioned choirs are becoming less popular in the U.S. Why do you think that is?

People’s lives are getting too frenetic for them to make a weekly commitment to a volunteer chorus or to their church choirs. It is not just a problem in the United States. People need to support their symphonies and [choruses](#) all over the world. Articles are popping up in periodicals about these problems. There are fewer church choirs than ever before. Volunteers do not have the time and churches do not have the budget to support professionals.

What role should choral lovers/supporters in the community play in preserving choral music?

You are asking something very important here. A volunteer chorus is a singing community. Not only do the members make music together, but the ensembles provide a social outlet for the singers. A chorus rehearsal is where people turn off their cell phones and become a musical family. It is the responsibility of that musical family to educate the general public about why they sing in the chorus. They need to be active. They can do that by selling tickets to their performances and getting their friends and family excited to come hear live music, as well as trying their hand at social media. It does not cost anything to write something about their chorus on a Facebook page. And in 2014, participation in a volunteer group extends beyond the weekly rehearsal. Each member needs to understand that social media awareness and participation can help a group survive. And one more thing, members should communicate outside of rehearsals. It would not hurt them to sit down and grab a cup of coffee together.

I view myself primarily as a soloist, though I have sung with world-renowned choirs and conductors, such as yourself and Brigham Young University's current chorus master, Ronald Staheli. I have personally struggled with blending in choir. What is your approach to blending and what advice would you give to the solo singer struggling with it?

Thank you for your kind words about me. [Voice faculties](#) must wake up and prepare their students for all types of jobs in music and stop thinking that choral singing hurts people. It does not. They should realize that singers make a living by various types of jobs, which may mean singing in a chorus. Everyone cannot become an opera star! They should not frown if their students sing in an opera or oratorio chorus. What's more, by singing in a chorus, their students might meet people with similar tastes and passions, learn from one another, study a great work of art together, and, perhaps, meet someone to have lunch with! Being a social animal is as important as being a fine singer!

I rarely use the word *blend* in a rehearsal. Singers must be taught how to listen and be seated with people with whom they can sing and make music comfortably. It takes time for me to know the voices well enough so this can happen with ease.

Finally, "solo" singers must think about their bodies, their instruments, and always support the sound and sing in the [center of the pitch](#). They are doing something wrong if they get vocally tied during a rehearsal or performance.

And they should work on their sight-reading skills as well as language skills.

Our Expert Recommends

- [Interview with Chorus Master Judith Clurman](#)
- [Choral Repertoire with Judith Clurman](#)
- [From Sesame Street to Carnegie Hall with Judith Clurman](#)

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